

Older Adults and Asthma

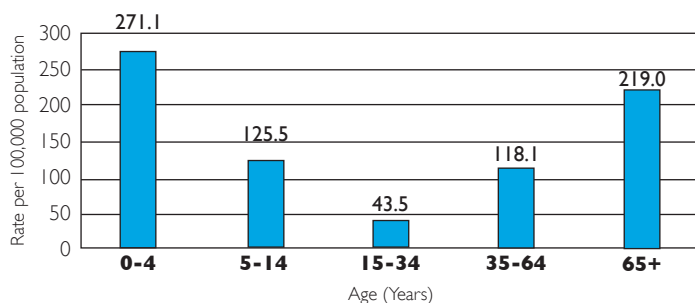
IN NORTH CAROLINA

Asthma is common among older persons, affecting around 10% of those above age 65. Despite its prevalence, late onset asthma may be misdiagnosed and inadequately treated, with important negative consequences for the person's health.

Asthma in older patients is **often under-diagnosed** due to respiratory symptoms similar to those found in persons with COPD, lung cancer, pulmonary infection, and chronic bronchitis.



Asthma Hospitalizations, by Age Group, North Carolina, 2009



Source: State Center for Health Statistics, N.C., 2009.

- Lifetime (ever had) asthma prevalence among adults 65+ years in North Carolina was 10.5%, and in the United States, 10.7%¹. The current (still have) asthma prevalence among older adults was 6.7% in North Carolina; among U.S. adults it was 7.5%¹.

- In 2009, the asthma hospitalization rate for the 65+ age group was 185.1 per 100,000 population, the second highest rate after the 0-4 year age group.²



Ten key tips to controlling and managing asthma⁵

1. Visit your doctor every six months, even if you think your asthma is under control.
2. Be sure to use your asthma medicines correctly.
3. Always use a holding chamber (or spacer) with your metered dose inhaler.
4. Make sure you always have access to your asthma medicines.
5. Get a written asthma action plan from your doctor. Make sure you understand it and have it updated at least every year. In 2008, 68.3% of North Carolina adults did not obtain an asthma management plan from their doctor.³
6. Know what triggers your asthma and how to avoid conditions that may trigger an attack.
7. Ask your doctor about tests to determine if you have allergies to specific triggers.
8. Avoid exposure to tobacco smoke.
9. Ask your doctor about testing your lung function (spirometry) at least every 1-2 years.
10. Be sure you get a flu shot every year (available in the fall).

Asthma is a chronic disease that requires effective control and management.

- More than 70% of adults 65 and older with asthma in North Carolina **do not have an asthma action plan** that was provided by their health care provider.³
- About 67% of adults aged 65 and older with asthma in North Carolina take prescription asthma medication to prevent an asthma attack from occurring³.
- North Carolina adults 65 and older have an asthma mortality rate of 31.9 per million population compared to 6.8 per million for the under 65 age group.⁴

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention & Health (2009). (www.cdc.gov/asthma/brfss/09/brfssdata.htm). Accessed July 11, 2011.

² North Carolina State Center for Health Statistics, provisional asthma hospitalization data, 2009.

³ Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, North Carolina State Center for Health Statistics, North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (2008)

⁴ North Carolina State Center for Health Statistics, asthma mortality data, 2009.

⁵ About Asthma. (<http://hud.gov/offices/lead/healthyhomes/asthma.cfm>). Accessed December 21, 2009.

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**For more information, please visit
the NC Asthma Program's website
at www.asthma.ncdhhs.gov
or call the Asthma Program
at (919) 707-5213
for additional assistance.**